

Tai Chi Treatment for Parkinson's Disease

By Kristin Smith First Coast News Created: 4/23/2008 7:46:59 PM

Updated: 4/24/2008 12:02:27 AM

JACKSONVILLE, FL -- A new treatment for Parkinson's Disease is an age-old exercise from 14th century China. And Shands Hospital is now introducing it to patients.

Doctors there say Tai Chi helps ease the symptoms of Parkinson's for patients like Lowell Salter.

"When you get Parkinson's it's more important that you be aware and use your body and exercise it and stretch it," said Salter.

Salter was diagnosed three years ago.

The most obvious change to his life, he says, is the loss of control in his left hand.

"Aging causes you to get kind of tight in your joints," said Salter.

He says the hardest part, though, is just reminding himself to do the simple things.

"When you have Parkinson's you have to remind yourself to smile," said Salter.

Lately though, smiles have more frequent for Salter.

That's thanks to a relatively new and holistic approach doctors are now taking to dealing with Parkinson's.

"By mimicking smooth movements, it's very helpful to patients. It helps to re-train the brain, if you will," said Shands Hospital Dr. Darlene Lobel.

Lobel says some patients could see improvements within just a few sessions.

Salter says the age-old exercise has helped him.

"It's very good therapy for everyone," said Salter.

You don't have to be a patient at Shands to benefit. Patients getting treatment from any hospital can take part in the classes held at Shands.

The Tai Chi class is held Wednesdays, from 10-11 a.m.

There is also a Yoga class, held Tuesdays, from 10:30-11:30 a.m.

The classes are held at Shands, at 580 West 8th Street, Towers 1 and 2. A class schedule with specific room locations is always found inside the Towers entrance at the reception desk.

For more information, contact Shands appointment line at (904) 244-3961.

For information on specific exercise classes, contact (904) 244-9719.